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Author(s): Samuel P. Hays

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Right Face, Left Face: The Columbia Strike

SAMUEL P. HAYS

University of Pittsburgh

The Columbia student strike played a sharply different role in the life of the two fringes of the political spectrum. Viewing events from the opposite end of politics from which they took place, the Right discovered confirmation of its well-established explanations for and cures of the ills of modern America. To the Left, however, deeply involved in the events themselves, the strike served not merely to confirm the coercive power of the establishment, but to present a critical stage of self-development. Here we shall be concerned not with the unfolding events of the strike itself, but with the perception of the strike by both Right and Left.

I

To the casual observer within the broad center of American politics, including those self-designated as liberals, the political Right displays a single uniform set of values. But like the Left, the Right is deeply fractured and, both in ideology and tactics, sensitive to gradations within it. These distinctions within the Right, in fact, form a sub-spectrum from the anti-liberal Buckley-Goldwater-Young Americans for Freedom grouping at the boundary line between the Right and the Center, through the anti-Communist John Birch Society segment, to the "international conspiracy behind communism" theorists, and, finally, on the outer fringe, to those who

speak openly of the threat of Black and non-Caucasian peoples to Western civilization. From each of these segments of the Right came different reactions to the Columbia strike. Let us consider these reactions, in turn, from the extreme outer fringe to that segment which borders the Center.

For those on the extreme outer edge of the spectrum, the struggle for power between students and administration made little dent upon their political consciousness. Those who view the world with a sense of an impending racial crisis between black and white, in which often Jewish influence stands behind the blacks, could have found considerable confirmation of their beliefs in the strike, but, in fact, they paid little attention to it. One of the few such expressions was a letter to the *Thunderbolt*, publication of the National States Rights party: "Now it is the nation's colleges and universities that are being taken over by insane mobs of varmits [*sic*]. The only way to deal with these long haired-fuzzy faced faggots and return the campuses to normal is to get rid of the left-wing liberal so-called professors and the Communist Jew students."¹

The "conspiracy behind communism" Right displayed equally little interest in the strike. When it did, the strike constituted simply another instance of the perennial conspiracy of irreligion to destroy a divinely-inspired social order. Here is a complex of views which suggests a conspiracy far deeper than communism, which speaks of the Jewish-Masonic inspired secularism of the modern world, which focuses on the Illuminati as the hidden hand behind revolution since the last third of the eighteenth century. A surprisingly large number of groups in America, each small but vocal and prolific in writing, espouses this view of an international conspiracy that cuts deeper in society and deeper in time than communism. *Don Bell Reports*, a newsletter issued by Marah, Incorporated, in Palm Beach, Florida, expressed a typical reaction from this vantage point:

We are not suggesting a Communist Conspiracy per se. We are suggesting a far greater kind of conspiracy: a Satan-inspired conspiracy of Man against God which has led to a world-wide defiance of His law and His plans for both societies and governments; a conspiracy that manifests itself on both sides of the so-called Iron Curtain. In the

¹"C.L." to *Thunderbolt*, June 1968, issue #102.

greater sense, this is not a *political* revolution; it is a *religious* revolution: a revolution against God, which is neither new nor old, but *continuing*. . . .²

For such segments of the Right, Columbia and the rise of Students for a Democratic Society provided weary confirmation of long-held convictions.

The anti-Communist Right, most typified by the John Birch Society, viewed the strike as another instance of the Communist conspiracy. One of its most convenient sources of information was *U.S.A.*, published by Alice Widener.³ Now in its fifteenth year, *U.S.A.* provides a subscription news service about left-wing activities. Among publications on the Right, it is unique because it often provides original reporting and not simply commentary on other sources. In recent years Miss Widener has covered extensively the student movement and provided reports on the Socialist Scholars Conferences, SDS conventions, the Committee for Independent Political Action in Chicago, and the National Conference for New Politics. Most of these meetings she attended personally. The issue of March 1, 1968, the details of which were most widely publicized by *Barron's*, reported on an SDS meeting in the subcellar games room at Weinstein Resident Hall of New York University, February 10-11, 1968, at which the Columbia "revolution" was plotted.⁴ Several weeks later, in the issue of April 26, 1968, Miss Widener reported on the writings of John Hillson in the *Colorado Daily* at the University of Colorado, in which he outlined the details of the coming American revolution led by students and boldly "admitted" that eastern SDS members had been "arming heavily" and "caching their weapons for over a year."⁵ Shortly after the Columbia strike a selected group of Miss Widener's student articles were reprinted in a single booklet of seventy-five pages and sold widely on the newstands as well as in right-wing circles.⁶

² "The Religion of Revolution: Before You Can Build, You Must Destroy," *Don Bell Reports*, June 7, 1968.

³ See citations to Miss Widener, for example, in "Summer Starts in April," *Manion Forum Newsletter*, April 1968, and "On Campus—the Real Truth," *ibid.*, May 1968.

⁴ *Barron's National Business and Financial Weekly*, March 11, 1968.

⁵ *U.S.A.*, April 26, 1968.

⁶ Alice Widener, "Student Subversion," [New York, c. May 1968].

The anti-Communist Right worked these details into their arguments in a variety of ways. John Reid Kennedy, in *Christian Beacon*, the weekly publication of Reverend Carl McIntyre, called the strike "one of the most successful Marxist strategies ever undertaken in this country and appears to be turning into one of the greatest successes Communism in this country has ever had."⁷ Frank Capell cited the quotation of Paul Vilardi, leader of the Columbia student "Coalition of the Majority" in *U.S. News and World Report* that "Communists played an active role in the outbreak," and concluded, "The student uprisings and lawlessness are the result of indoctrination and secret plans carried out by the agents of International Communism."⁸ Others stressed simply the penchant for lawlessness as a Communist technique.⁹ One writer linked Columbia SDS with Cuba by means of Mark Rudd's visit there two months before the strike,¹⁰ and another implied a tie with Communist China.¹¹ *Manion Forum* quoted with approval the argument of Drew Pearson and Jack Anderson that Castro, having failed in Latin America, transferred the revolution to Europe and the United States by means of the universities.¹² And columnist John Chamberlain likened the fires during the second Columbia insurrection to the Reichstag Fire.¹³

Writers for John Birch Society publications, especially *The Review of the News*, were more explicit in detailing the conspiracy as involving both administration and students. The Society has often been able to find the Communist conspiracy in both the establishment and the Left; both are engaged in friendly in-fighting. For example, one writer for *The Review of the News* described the Vietnam war as a product of a "super-authority," an "invisible World Government" which directed the actions of Chinese,

⁷ John Reid Kennedy, "Columbia Milestone for Marxist Revolution," *Christian Beacon*, May 9, 1968.

⁸ "The Communist Student Plan," *The Herald of Freedom*, May 17, 1968.

⁹ *Freedom Talk*, July 29, Aug. 8, 1968; *The Wanderer*, May 9, 1968; Nils-Eric Brodin, "Social Violence is Counter Effective," *Christian Economics*, May 28, 1968.

¹⁰ Brad Baker, "Documentation of Communist Influence in Racial Turmoil," *The Conservative Journal*, May-June 1968.

¹¹ *Freedom's Facts*, June 1968.

¹² "The Revolution," *Manion Forum*, July 1968.

¹³ John Chamberlain, "Columbia U.; Reichstag Fire," *Houston Tribune*, July 25, 1968.

Soviet, and United States leaders.¹⁴ From such a perspective it was natural for a writer in *The Review* to focus not so much on the students but on the administration; why didn't it crack down? The obvious answer was that it is part of the conspiracy. "The so-called New Left is pursuing an obvious policy of rule-or-ruin with respect to American institutions of higher learning," wrote Susan Huck, "but it is really difficult to see why they have chosen to ruin what they already rule."¹⁵ "Why would the Communists send students into the streets screaming against an Establishment which is—as in France and the United States—already under control of the International Communist Conspiracy?"¹⁶ During his visit to Cuba, Mark Rudd got a "green light," but "what about the green light he got at Columbia?" The Columbia administration could easily be linked with the conspiracy, for were not its members and its trustees deeply involved in the Council on Foreign Relations, an organization which in many right-wing circles is the very core of the conspiracy and membership in which is proof of whether or not one is subversive.¹⁷ And one writer hinted darkly, "Strangely enough, of the 400 persons arrested for criminal trespass during the revolutionary encounter at Columbia, none were fingerprinted . . . on order of someone at the top."¹⁸

Closer to the borderline between Center and Right as represented by such publications as *New Guard*, the organ of Young Americans for Freedom, *National Review*, *Human Events*, and *Twin Circle*, there is less emphasis upon conspiracy and more on misguided liberals. Here is a willingness to distinguish between Old Left and New Left, between the Communist party and Students for a Democratic Society, and a willingness to cast the issues in terms

¹⁴ "The Vietnam Swindle," *The Review of the News*, Jan. 27-Feb. 2, 1966.

¹⁵ Susan Huck, "Coup in Columbia," *ibid.*, May 22, 1968.

¹⁶ Dave Gumaer, "Report: The New Left," *ibid.*, July 17, 1968.

¹⁷ Huck, "Coup in Columbia." At least four books have appeared exposing the Council on Foreign Relations as a center of the international conspiracy: Dan Smoot, *The Invisible Government* (Dallas, 1962); Kent and Phoebe Courtney, *America's Unelected Rulers* (New Orleans, 1962); Mary M. Davison, *The Secret Government of the United States* (Omaha, 1962); Helen P. Lasell, *Power Behind the Government Today* (New York, 1963). It is not without significance that the Left also recommends some of these writings as exposures of the establishment; see North American Congress on Latin America, "N.A.C.L.A. Research Methodology Guide" (New York, 1968), 2, 5.

¹⁸ Gumaer, "Report."

of the contending parties within the Columbia context itself, to debate, for example, the issues of freedom of opinion, of majority rule, and coercion by minorities.

For its information, the anti-liberal Right relied upon two sources, in addition to Miss Widener; first, the students at Columbia who opposed the strike, whose most vocal spokesmen in right-wing publications were leaders of Young Americans for Freedom¹⁹ and, second, the professional New Left expert, Philip Abbott Luce, formerly a leader of the Progressive Labor party who several years ago moved over to the Right and now has become the spearhead of YAF anti-New Left campus activities.²⁰ Rooted in campus conservative affairs, these spokesmen emphasized the vast differences between Berkeley and Columbia; while at Berkeley, they argued, there was no opposition to the Left, at Columbia there was. For the first time a major segment of student opinion was mobilized to oppose the student Left. Moreover, that counter-thrust, in their eyes, was the crucial factor in forcing the administration to bring in the police and end the strike.

The anti-liberal Right focused on two issues: the weakness of the administration and the coercive tactics of the SDS minority. In the months before the strike, the argument went, the administration made one concession after another; a pattern developed of SDS aggression and administration appeasement. In the fall of 1967 this pattern, for conservatives, came to a head; a committee had been appointed to study the issue of military recruiting on campus and many feared another administration "surrender." Those who favored open recruiting organized themselves as the "Students for a Free Campus." Then came the strike, and as the events of Tuesday, April 23, unfolded the administration did nothing and SDS opponents became angry. White students left Hamilton Hall and broke into Low Library, "all without a single sign of administration awareness, let alone opposition."²¹ The role of anti-SDS students in subsequent days is well known; post-mortems by

¹⁹ John C. Meyer, "What Happened at Columbia and Why," *New Guard*, Sept. 1968, pp. 14-17; Alan MacKay, "The View from the Right Side of the Campus," *Manion Forum*, Aug. 4, 1968; David Franke, "What Decent Students Must Do," *Human Events*, June 15, 1968, pp. 7-8, 11.

²⁰ Phillip Abbott Luce, "How SDS Hopes to Disrupt America," *Human Events*, June 15, 1968, pp. 9-10.

²¹ Meyer, "What Happened at Columbia."

the anti-liberal Right recount these as successful attempts finally to force the administration to act. The *National Review* drew larger lessons from the event. National Democratic party strength in Germany, it warned, increases with the excesses of Left students in Berlin. Here is "a warning to magistrates and administrators of the kind of danger that may lie ahead if they continue abjectly derelict in their duty."²²

But equal attention was given to the relationship between majorities and minorities on campus. In fact, one conservative close to the Columbia events argued that the issue was entirely one of SDS tactics rather than its ends. Despite the endorsement of open recruiting by over two-thirds of those voting, SDS refused to accept it and obstructed Dow Chemical recruiting. The referendum on Thursday and Friday of the strike—in which the gym construction was condemned 4,093-1,855; SDS tactics deplored 4,142-1,325; and amnesty rejected 3,166-2,054—was emphasized. Dale Francis, publisher of *Twin Circle*, summarized the argument: "The right of an individual to dissent does not and must not include his right to destroy the freedom of others. . . . We are being challenged by totalitarians who, under the guise of exercising freedom, are violating the freedom of others."²³ Luce emphasized the point more precisely; the New Left argues that civil liberties are no longer important and can be abridged if "an institution and individuals associated with that institution have lost their legitimacy and their rights." This happens, said Luce, when an SDSer's conscience tells him that such is the case. Once, Luce reported, he had debated the president of the St. Louis University student body on participatory democracy. "What," asked Luce, "if through participatory democracy the group voted to continue in Vietnam?" The reply, "Obviously the majority would be wrong."²⁴

The Columbia strike's major contribution to right-wing thought was to bring the SDS into center-stage as the symbol of all that was wrong in American student life. A report on SDS by J. Edgar Hoover, which received wide publicity in the mass media, served as authority to bolster the conclusions drawn from the strike events themselves. A large number of right-wing papers reported his re-

²² "Campus Waves and Undertows," *National Review*, May 14, 1968, p. 73.

²³ Dale Francis, "Destroying Universities," *Twin Circle*, May 19, 1968.

²⁴ Luce, "How SDS Hopes to Disrupt America."

marks with approval.²⁵ At the same time few segments of the Right sought to distinguish among the various segments of the Columbia Left. The distinction between SDS and such "student power" manifestations as the Students for a Restructured University was never made. None understood the tensions within SDS itself, and instead of noting the highly tenuous character of cooperation between black and white student groups, they were convinced that the two groups worked together closely.²⁶ By mid-summer the Right was primed to consider SDS as the major focus of its anti-Left student thrust; even to Young Americans for Freedom it had almost replaced YAF's traditional student enemy, the National Student Association.

II

While to the Right the Columbia strike merely provided new facts to confirm its previous views, and gradations of reaction conformed precisely with gradations in established outlooks, to the Left it presented a more complex challenge. For the strike came at a time when lines of differentiation within the Left were in the process of rapid formation. All segments of the Left—Old as well as New—shared in the general attack on the Columbia administration and its links with the larger national establishment—with capitalism and imperialism. All recounted the events at Columbia with special emphasis upon the misused power of President Kirk and the trustees, the brutality of the police, and the complicity of the "jocks." But even within these descriptions of the events there were differences in emphasis, in wording, in tone which were to emerge more fully in later weeks and months, as sharp conflicts among forces the Left had set in motion.²⁷

²⁵ *Alabama Independent*, June 5-12, 1968; *The Cross and the Flag*, Sept. 1968; *The Wanderer*, Sept. 12, 1968; *Christian Battle Cry*, June-July 1968.

²⁶ Alice Widener, "More Trouble at Columbia?" *Human Events*, Sept. 7, 1968, p. 11.

²⁷ Details of the strike from a New Left viewpoint can be followed best via Liberation News Service releases which appeared in a number of underground papers. See, for example, Steve Diamond and others, "Revolution at Columbia," in *The Fifth Estate*, May 16-31, 1968; "The Columbia Revolution," *Los Angeles Free Press*, May 10-16, 1968; Allen Young, "Columbia Lives," *Washington Free Press*, May 18, 1968; Tom Hamilton, "Roll on Columbia," *Fifth Estate*, June 4-18, 1968. Other accounts are Stephan A. Levinson, "Hail Columbia, I was the only

The transition in this development was the first police action in clearing the campus in the early morning of Tuesday, April 30, for this action sharply increased student support for the strike. The votes on Thursday and Friday of the previous week had indicated strong support for SDS on the substantive issues but not for its tactics. The police bust reversed all this, for now the onus of undesirable tactics was placed upon the police and the administration. The strike leaders suddenly found themselves with a mass of followers with whom they had to cope. But this very success carried with it the seeds of disaster for the strikers; so many new camp followers could not possibly see the strike issues and the proper course of action from here on in the same way. While divergent tendencies had been kept in check during the occupation by the desire of all for success, the bust and the new support provided an opportunity for each one of these tendencies to capture newly radicalized students for its own brand of left-wing politics. It should be emphasized that this sorting out occurred almost entirely within the newer Left movement. Although the Communist party and the Socialist Workers party, for example, covered the strike fully and published special material for organizing during it, they remained on the periphery of the subsequent intra-Left debate.²⁸ The same was true of the more recent "sectarian" manifestations of Marxism and Leninism.²⁹

One of these sets of divergent tendencies sorted out liberals from radicals with respect to issues, tactics, and student power. SDS'

Reporter Inside," *Berkeley Barb*, May 3-9, 1968, and "Columbia Rules the Waives," *ibid.*, May 24-30, 1968; Jeff Shero, "Columbia, An Unhysterical Report," *San Francisco Express-Times*, May 9, 1968; Roger Taus, "How Rebels Did It," *Challenge*, Extra, May 1968; "Columbia Replies to Student Demands with Policemen's Clubs," *Guardian*, May 4, 1968; Irwin Silber, "Columbia: the Last Hours," *ibid.*, May 4, 1968; Constance Ullman, "Columbia Class Boycott is Success," *ibid.*, May 11, 1968; "Students Plot Action at Columbia . . . and the Strike Goes On," *ibid.*, May 18, 1968; Randy Furst, "Columbia Rebels Discover the Enemy," *ibid.*, June 1, 1968; Peter Henig, "Columbia Moderates Confused, but Well-Endowed," *ibid.*, July 20, 1968.

²⁸ For Socialist Workers party coverage, see *The Militant*, May 10, 17, 24, 1968; for Communist party views, see *The Worker*, May 5, 7, 14, 19, 21, 28, 1968.

²⁹ See Karen Funkiel, "Columbia and the Future of Student Insurrection," *The Bulletin of International Socialism*, May 13, 1968; Pat Connolly, "Columbia Plans Crackdown on the Students," *ibid.*, Sept. 2, 1968; Danny Luce, "Red Flag on Morningside Heights," *Partisan*, IV (1968), 16-17, 29.

major occupation has been to fashion a radical position among students in opposition to a liberal one. While liberals focused on due process and decision-making within the university, radicals emphasized the substantive issues of war and race and the attendant links between the university and the wider society. For many months SDS had sought to radicalize students from one position to the other; this objective dominated their tactics at Columbia. Even during the first days of the strike SDS sharply distinguished the two positions, but its energies at that time focused on events rather than ideologies to capture potential recruits; its major purpose, in fact, was to guide events, not so much to resolve substantive issues—which it did not believe could be resolved within the Columbia context—but to involve students in radical action and thereby recruit them to the cause. After the bust, however, the ideological tactics came to the fore and divergences appeared. The best statement of distinctions between the liberal and radical positions was written by Steve Halliwell in the *Guardian* in August. Liberalism, he wrote, can give answers to questions of morality and individual choice, but it is not equipped to deal with a campaign addressed to institutional power. The liberals had broken with the strike committee to focus on the activities of the Committee for a Restructured University. Halliwell welcomed this departure. He wrote, "There is a new solidity to the Columbia movement, now that it has transcended quibbling with liberal morality both in analysis and action."³⁰

Included in Halliwell's category of liberals were not only old-line Democratic Socialists of the Socialist party type,³¹ but also newer "non-violence" type of war resisters who generalized their objections to war into objections to the prevailing social system and sought the liberation of community and decentralized alternative institutions. Such magazines as *Liberation* and *WIN* expressed these views, and they soon found much to criticize. David Osher, a member of the Fayerweather commune during the strike who resigned from the Strike Steering Committee during the early

³⁰ Steve Halliwell, "Rebellion Heightened Radical Awareness," *Guardian*, Aug. 24, 1968. Another statement of the same position, but from a different SDS faction, is Paul Rockwell, "The Uprising at Columbia: A Radical View," *New York Free Press*, May 9, 1968.

³¹ For a Socialist party reaction, see cartoon in *New America*, June 5, 1968.

summer, outlined his reservations about strike tactics in an article in *WIN* in May.³² While the "liberals" stressed the substantive issues and were willing to compromise on the issue of amnesty, the radicals, concerned more with issue tactics as a means of radicalizing students, made amnesty the central question. This disagreement, moreover, generated conflict between the communes and the strike central agencies, dominated more by SDS and its Progressive Labor party segment. The central agencies, controlling the flow of information among the various groups of strikers, exercised considerable influence in the development of tactics and issues, and prevented the "liberal" view on amnesty from seriously affecting strike tactics. Although these differences were temporarily submerged to assure victory, they came out after the bust. Sharp opposition developed to SDS-PLP leadership as being highly manipulative and inconsistent with the practice of participatory democracy. SDS has long been plagued with the issue of "elitism"; it crops up again and again in regional and national meetings. The Columbia strike gave this conflict new shape and meaning.

A third distinction between liberals and radicals was sharpened by the Columbia strike, the issue of student power. The decision of New Left leaders in SDS to focus primarily upon the campus battleground has generated a severe dilemma. On the one hand, they must mobilize students in terms of the matters that affect students directly, that is, university conditions that affect their own lives—courses, student hours, the draft. Yet, these matters have little immediate connection with issues of power in society and the world at large, issues to which New Left theoreticians and tacticians are most closely attuned.³³ SDS leaders are fully aware of this problem. Yet the fact remains that the energy they generate among students often serves primarily to change conditions within the university rather than to deal with the extra-university society. Student power symbolizes this problem. To the strike leaders student power was a false issue; students in no way could improve their lives within a university dominated by men whose power was inextricably linked to power in the wider society. To most

³² David Osher, "Commencement at Columbia," *WIN*, July 1968; see also Maris Cakers, "Screw U," *WIN*, May 15, 1968.

³³ A good analysis of this dilemma can be found in Eric Mann, "Columbia Exam: A Special Supplement," *The Movement*, Nov. 1968.

students, however, changes within the university were real possibilities involving real gains. As soon as the *Columbia Spectator*, immediately after the first bust, called for the heads of Kirk and Truman, strike leaders began to warn against the implications of student power.³⁴ Although hostile to student power, SDS finds that its actions invariably generate it.

III

If the strike sharpened differences between liberals and radicals, it also heightened divergent tendencies within radicalism itself. These had been in motion for some time, but the strike provided an opportunity for differences to emerge more sharply. The responsibility of conducting the strike and mobilizing in post-strike ventures those aroused by the events and the struggle for loyalty to different tendencies had the effect of increasing competition among rival radical groups. Although the Left, Old and New, appears to many in the Center and on the Right as monolithic, it is in fact composed of many individuals, groups, tendencies, each with its own brand of radicalism, its own explanations and cures, each seeking a following for its brand of truth. The very success of the Columbia strike spurred each on to new efforts in organizing.

During the twelve to eighteen months prior to the Columbia strike it appears almost as if the Left had chosen New York City in which to evolve its internal dialectic. A wide variety of new groupings and publications appeared on the scene. The Progressive Labor party had long been based there; its deep involvement in SDS meant that New York would be the focus of its impact on SDS.³⁵ The Lower East Side was developing its own brand of youth culture anarchism, with media outlets such as *Black Mask*, *Anarchos*, and *Rat*. Here also was the *Guardian*, which during the winter of 1967-68 had changed from a "progressive" to a "radical" weekly, and was especially receptive to the "new working class"

³⁴ Roger Taus of Columbia PLP and SDS wrote, "It wasn't for any low level abstract rhetoric of 'we want to make the decisions that control our lives,'" that the strike was conducted. "This is not a fight for 'structural reform.' NO 'NEW,' 'FREE' OR 'DEMOCRATIC' COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY CAN EXIST UNDER IMPERIALISM!" See Taus, "How Rebels Did It."

³⁵ Progressive Labor's activities in New York can be followed in its monthly magazine, *Challenge*, and its theoretical journal, *Progressive Labor*.

tendencies within SDS represented by such spokesmen as Carl Davidson and Gregory Calvert.³⁶ And here, finally, was a rather new tendency which would emerge as the New York SDS Labor Committee, publishing its own periodical, *The Campaigner*, which castigated all anarchist and syndicalist decentralizing groups within SDS and joined PLP in attacking the "youth culture" base of the dominant SDS tendency.³⁷ The Columbia strike did not generate these divergent views, but it played a major role in shaping them and sharpening the subsequent debates among the New Left.³⁸

The sharpest conflict came over the issue of youth culture. Much of the New Left has its roots not in a formulation of concepts of social structure and social change which, in turn, form the groundwork of action, but, instead, in the personal youth rebellion of our time. Rock music, certain styles of dress, pot, and sexual freedom are the outward manifestations of a culture from which the vast number of recruits can be gained and which, in turn, shapes much of the New Left. Personal rebellion gives rise to demands for "control over our own lives" and hostility to cops and authority figures; a systematic analysis of social change recedes into the background. True, those leaders who seek to shape this personal rebellion into a political movement, and thereby expose themselves to the charge of being an "intellectual elite," urge a more highly articulated set of concepts about the "new working class" or "post-capitalist society." But these theories are sustained not by intellectual content but by personal rebellion, and that source of energy not only generates theory but also shapes tactics and organization as well. It propels a theory of participatory democracy into an espousal of decentralization and anarcho-syndicalism in a variety of forms. It asserts the triumph of the individual will over reality, rather than

³⁶ See, for example, Greg Calvert and Carol Neiman, "Internationalism New Left Style," *Guardian*, June 8, 15, 22, 29, 1968.

³⁷ The first issue of *The Campaigner* appeared in February 1968. The most complete statement of its critique of the "youth culture" base are two articles, "The Politics of Crisis" (editorial) and C. LaRouche and L. Marcus, "The New Left, Local Control and Fascism," in *The Campaigner*, Sept. 1968.

³⁸ A brief introduction to some of the varied recent currents in the New Left, with good coverage of bibliographic sources, is James P. O'Brien, "The New Left, 1967-68," *Radical America*, II (Nov.-Dec. 1968), 28-43, the third of a series on the New Left since 1960.

a disciplined movement working with the forces of the external world.³⁹

In contrast with this view is one which emphasizes the need to build sustained, disciplined power within a framework of economic inequalities and the industrial discipline which generates and sustains them. There is emphasis on the working class, as in Old Left thought, as a source of power which must be organized, disciplined, directed into action to take power from those who control the system. Decentralization only vitiates this discipline, it is argued; one must seize the power of the state rather than buy the romantic notion held by anarchists that they can destroy all power and live in a purely libertarian condition; individual rebellion must be harnessed, converted into disciplined group action. Student action is not enough, for student action inevitably leads to student power and isolation from the larger world; instead, worker-student alliances should be cemented into a source of disciplined power. While the youth-culture Left seeks contacts with blue-collar workingmen in terms of a common youth rebellion, the working-class Left seeks those contacts within the context of the work situation. It is hardly surprising that the latter segment of the Left is often "straight" in personal behavior and pointedly rejects pot, "hippie" styles, rock music, and sexual freedom.

These tendencies joined in the Columbia strike, but soon afterward diverged. The Liberation School which the strike committee set up soon after the bust was intended to be an example of a new kind of university; instead, it became the seedbed of differences and provided the opportunity for those competing for loyalty within radicalism to shift their strategy from action to explanation. Here, for example, in the post-strike days Paul Rockwell and Tony Papert argued for the position of the New York SDS Labor Committee against the "new working class" tendencies. Their development of a well-formulated position was one of the major New Left innovations in the summer of 1968. By the fall they had become a major source of opposition to the "new working class" element in Columbia SDS; they supported the Teachers Union and opposed community control in the teachers strike on the grounds of the

³⁹ A thoughtful analysis of this view and its implications is Irving Louis Horowitz, "Radicals and the Revolt Against Reason," *New Politics*, VI (1968), 30-41.

dangers of decentralization, and this in direct opposition to SDS leadership. SDS in turn abolished the Labor Committee and erected a new one in its place.⁴⁰

A more persistent conflict developed between Progressive Laborites and the "new working class" theorists. Since early 1965 PL had worked hard to strengthen its position within SDS. By 1968 SDS meetings had become deeply involved in the conflict between PL influence and its youth-culture opposition. The two factions had worked together fairly well during the Columbia strike, but shortly thereafter Steve Halliwell had bitterly attacked PL for its tactics during the strike.⁴¹ The animosity increased at subsequent SDS meetings. Youth culture and "new working class" theory were attacked in the pages of *Progressive Labor*, and the two positions were aired thoroughly in *New Left Notes*.⁴² Although PL joined forces with Columbia "new working class" leaders to oust their rivals, the New York SDS Labor Committee, the conflict between the two tendencies remained to vitiate the strength of SDS.⁴³ By January 1969 Staughton Lynd could complain bitterly in *New Left Notes* that sectarianism with all its tactical devices had made the New Left into an up-dated version of the Old Left.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ The conflict between SDS and the Labor Committee, from the latter point of view, can be followed in "SDS, Last Spurt of Growth?" and "'Police Socialism' in NYC," in *The Campaigner*, Dec. 1968. For other views see Louis Dolinar, "Labor Committee Disbanded by SDS General Assembly," *Columbia Spectator*, Oct. 31, 1968; Tony Papert, "Community Control, a Better Idea," *ibid.*, Nov. 7, 1968; and *New Left Notes*, Dec. 18, 1968.

⁴¹ Letter by Steve Halliwell, "Open Letter to the Membership on Columbia's Student Movement," *New Left Notes*, June 10, 1968, and reply by Roger Taus, *ibid.*, July 8, 1968.

⁴² Jared Israel and William Russel, "Herbert Marcuse and His Philosophy of Copout," John Cerve, "Drugs: Liberator or Oppressor?" and Jeff Gordon, "SDS: An Analysis," all in *Progressive Labor*, VI (Oct. 1968), 59-72, 73-78, 99-116; see also Jared Israel, "SLAP and the 'national collective,'" and Les Coleman, "False Factionalism and Ideological Clarity," in *New Left Notes*, Dec. 18, 1968.

⁴³ Several leaders of the SDS Labor Committee, especially Steve Fraser in Philadelphia and Tony Papert in New York, had broken with PL in May 1968 and thereby constituted a rival group to PL. Their position is described in Fraser and Papert, "Economism or Socialism?" *The Campaigner*, Dec. 1968. Some Progressive Labor criticism of the Labor Committee, in turn, can be found in Larry Poleshuck, "Phony 'Labor Committee' Loses SDS Name," *Challenge*, Dec. 1968.

⁴⁴ Staughton Lynd, "Factionalism," *New Left Notes*, Feb. 5, 1969.

Finally, Columbia sharpened the relationships between black and white radicals. During the strike the white Left took great pains to stress the unified action of blacks and whites.⁴⁵ "The most decisive aspect of the Columbia story," one author wrote, "is the close tie between the student struggle and the black liberation struggle."⁴⁶ Progressive Laborites made much of this because they constituted the only segment of Columbia radicals which had active, personal links both within the Harlem community and Students for a Democratic Society.⁴⁷ On the whole, however, the highly tenuous, uncertain, unpredictable relationship between the SAS and SDS did not become clear until after the strike, and most notably in *Up Against the Ivy Wall*.⁴⁸ It appears that Columbia, without much explicit theorizing among the white New Left, defined the only viable relationship between white and black campus radicals that exists: black radicals define their objectives by themselves and whites, in turn, can decide whether or not to support them.

Within the Left, therefore, the Columbia strike constituted a watershed. Into it poured the stream of energy which had been in the making for several years. The details of the strike clearly were not planned, but the fact of confrontation was, and one senses an onrush of New Left forces to the maelstrom of New York City politics during 1967 with a heightened sense of expectation that here is where the action would be. Columbia became the setting for that action in the city, capturing the spotlight from a variety of minor incidents throughout the city's colleges and universities that could have become major ones. But, in turn, the New Left got more than it had bargained for. For it generated not only a strike which showed its strength in terms of student power, but also stimulated a sharp clarification of tendencies within the amorphous setting of "participatory democracy" which led off into a variety of directions. The immediate impact of these divergent tendencies

⁴⁵ Michael Jay, "Columbia Sit-In Tests Black-White Unity," *People's World*, May 18, 1968, and "Columbia Revolt: Study in Black and White," *ibid.*, May 25, 1968.

⁴⁶ "2, 3 Many Columbias," *The Movement*, June 1968.

⁴⁷ This is reflected in Juana, "Black Students Link With Harlem," in *Challenge*, Extra, May 1968.

⁴⁸ Jerry Avorn and members of the staff of the Columbia Daily Spectator, *Up Against the Ivy Wall* (New York, 1968), *passim*.

was to vitiate the movement and to place heavy burdens upon the new SDS ventures which, inspired by the Columbia strike, arose throughout the nation in the fall of 1968.

Right-wing conceptions of politics have in the past decade displayed few innovations; writers continue to restate, add detail, and elaborate, but the perceptions of the Right remain basically unchanged. Columbia merely confirmed these views. But during the same time the Left has been undergoing considerable ferment; it has, in fact, generated more variety in Left thought and action than in any previous time in American history. This complex elaboration has grown out of a variety of circumstances, but it seems clear that among them the Columbia strike was one of the most crucial.